DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 336 PS 021 887

AUTHOR Hyson, Marion C.; DeCsipkes, Candace
TITLE Educational and Developmental Belief Systems among African-American Parents of Kindergarten Children.
PUB DATE Mar 93
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (70th, New Orleans, LA, March 25-28, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Mothers; Child Behavior; *Child Caregivers; *Child Development; Kindergarten Children; Learning Strategies; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; *Primary Education; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS African Americans; Developmentally Appropriate Programs; *Parent Expectations

ABSTRACT

By describing the characteristics of the educational and developmental belief systems of low-income African-American parents of kindergarten children, this study extended previous research on parents' beliefs about early education and development to more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse subject groups. A sample of 115 African-American mothers and other primary caregivers of kindergarten children completed a version of the Educational Attitude Scale and reported their intended involvement in home and school learning activities. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 21 parents. Regardless of their own educational level, participants favored adult-directed, formally academic strategies for promoting children's learning and development. Behavioral expectations were especially high for African-American boys, particularly among less educated parents. Positive correlations between sets of items describing developmentally inappropriate and appropriate practices reflected a tendency to approve of both formal, paper-and-pencil learning and informal, concrete methods. This response pattern contrasts with patterns identified in previous research with affluent white parents and early childhood teachers, who made sharp distinctions between these educational approaches. Results suggest that most African-American parents support all attempts to enhance their children's learning and that theoretical distinctions are not salient. (MM)

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Educational and Developmental Belief Systems Among African-American Parents of Kindergarten Children

Marion C. Hyson

Candace DeCsipkes

Department of Individual and Family Studies

University of Delaware

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Running Head: PARENTS' BELIEFS

The authors acknowledge with thanks the administration, staff, and parents of Douglass Kindergarten Center and the research office of the Red Clay School District. We also appreciate the assistance of parent interviewers and research assistants Erika Ennis, Gloria James, and Jan Pickersgill. Requests for reprints may be sent to Marion C. Hyson, Department of Individual and Family Studies, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716.

PS 021887

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Abstract

Relatively little study has been made of the educational and developmental belief systems of parents from ethnic minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. A sample of 115 African-American mothers and other primary caregivers of kindergarten children completed a version of the Educational Attitude Scale and reported their intended involvement in home and school learning activities. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 21 parents. Regardless of their own educational level, participants favored adult-directed, formally academic strategies for promoting children's learning and development. Behavioral expectations were especially high for African-American boys, particularly among less educated parents. Positive correlations between sets of items describing what NAEYC has termed "developmentally inappropriate" and "appropriate" practices reflected a tendency to approve of both formal, paper-and-pencil learning and more informal, concrete methods. This response pattern contrasts with previous research with affluent White parents and early childhood teachers, who made sharp distinctions between these educational approaches. Results suggest that most African-American parents support all attempts to enhance their children's learning and that theoretical distinctions such as "developmentally appropriate/inappropriate practices" are not salient.

Educational and Developmental Belief Systems Among African-American Parents of Kindergarten Children

Educational interventions to enhance the life chances of young minority and low income children are believed to be more successful if they include families as partners (Powell, 1988, 1989; Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). But effective collaboration with parents requires an understanding of their ideas and values. Parents possess coherent belief systems concerning children's development and learning (Sigel et al., 1992). In turn, these beliefs influence parents' interactions with their children and may indirectly shape developmental outcomes (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, Rescorla, Cone, & Martell-Boinske, 1991; Rescorla, Hyson, & Hirsh-Pasek, 1990).

Some of these beliefs and related practices have been criticized by early childhood educators. Elkind (1987) and others claim that today's parents place overly stringent demands on young children, creating inappropriate expectations for compliance with adult standards. These critics have warned that, in order to placate high-pressure parents, schools may adopt practices that rush young children into formal academic learning which is poorly suited to their interests and learning styles. To counter these trends, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has strongly endorsed "developmentally appropriate practices" in all early childhood programs (Bredekamp, 1987). As usually implemented, these practices include extensive

child choice, concrete materials, play, and projects, frequently combined with a maturationist concept of readiness (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Smith & Shepard, 1988). In the past few years, many public schools have adopted more developmentally appropriate approaches to kindergarten-primary education, as part of their school restructuring initiatives.

However, neither early childhood professionals nor parents are in agreement about the desirability, or even the precise definition, of developmentally appropriate practices for young children's education (Bloch, 1991; Walsh, 1991). A study of affluent White parents (Rescorla, Hyson, & Hirsh-Pasek, 1990) found sharp contrasts in educational beliefs. Some parents advocated active learning, play, and exploration, with relaxed standards for children's behavior. Other parents rejected these ideas and endorsed more adult-directed, formally academic approaches to early education and child rearing.

A number of writers have emphasized that, along with developmental considerations, cultural values should also define an "appropriate" curriculum for young children (Hale-Benson, 1986; Jipson, 1991; Spodek, 1991). These writers urge an examination of, and respect for, the particular skills, competencies, and dispositions that families and communities wish children to develop through early education programs.

Goals of the Study

The present study extends previous research on parents' beliefs about early education and development to more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse settings, by describing the characteristics of the educational and developmental belief systems of a sample of low income African-American parents of kindergarten children. Descriptions

of Black child rearing and educational values (Comer & Poussaint, 1992; Hale-Benson, 1986; Nobles, Goddard, Cavil, & George, 1987) suggested that the parents in our study might endorse beliefs that emphasized relatively strong adult social control and formal academic goals.

Research with minority populations has been criticized for ignoring within-group variations in favor of simplified (and usually unfavorable) comparisons of minority children and parents with White middle class families (Peters, 1985; Slaughter-Defoe et al., 1990; Spencer, Brookins, & Allen, 1985). These writers and others have argued that ethnic minority populations are worthy of study in their own right and have pointed out the lack of normative information about virtually every aspect of child and family life within minority groups (Kelly, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Ogbu, 1988). Thus, one goal of the present study is to identify variations in parental beliefs within the study's sample, and to link those variations to specific parent and child characteristics, including education, family structure, and gender. Because of current concerns about risks to the development of young African-American males (Gibbs, 1988), we were especially interested in learning more about adults' beliefs and expectations for the kindergarten boys in our sample.

In addition to examining the structure of parental beliefs, we also wanted to explore relationships between beliefs and practices. Therefore, parents were asked about their past involvement in their children's learning at home and at school, and they responded to questions about their intention to be involved in a number of different kinds of learning activities during their child's kindergarten year. We were interested in examining patterns of beliefs and other factors that could influence parents' level of

involvement and their success in actually carrying out their intentions. Previous research (Sigel et al., 1992; Hyson et al., 1990) has frequently shown reliable connections between developmental beliefs and behavior, but the research has also underscored the complexity of belief-behavior relationships (Goodnow, 1988; Miller, 1988).

Finally, we wished to examine the structure of African-American parents' beliefs in relation to categories that have been used to characterize these kinds of beliefs in other research. Specifically, we were interested in whether distinctions between "Developmentally Appropriate" and "Developmentally Inappropriate" practices would appear to influence the belief systems of the parents in this study. We expected that they would, and that parents could be classified as endorsing one or the other approach and as being relatively "High Pressure" or "Low Pressure" in their preferred approach to child rearing.

Method

Sample

Parents (or other adult caregivers) of children attending a public school kindergarten center were recruited for the study. The school serves an urban, primarily low-income area and over 80% of the families are African-American. Although all parents were invited to participate, only the 115 parents who identified themselves as Black or African-American were included in the sample for the present study.

Household characteristics. The majority of participants (88%) were mothers, although grandmothers, fathers, foster parents and other relatives also responded. Seventy percent (70%) of the children lived in female-headed households. Almost 50%

of the households had only one adult member, usually the mother. Another 17% lived in three-generation households that included a grandparent. Other adult relatives, including aunts and uncles, lived in 53% of the households. Thus, the families in the study, although predominantly female-headed, were a mixture of small single parent households and larger, extended families.

Participants' education. Seven percent (7%) of the study's participants had graduated from college; 31% had some postsecondary education. Thirty-two percent (32%) had graduated from high school but had not gained any further education, and 30% did not graduate from high school.

Child characteristics. The children were 51% female and 43% first-born. For almost three-quarters of the children, kindergarten was not their first "school" experience. Many of the children (42%) had attended a Head Start program during the previous year. Another 30% of the children had experienced some other type of out-of-home care, including day care centers and family day care homes.

Procedure

In the fall, each parent was sent a packet with an explanatory letter, a copy of the questionnaire materials, and a return envelope. Packets were sent home by the child's teacher and returned to the school in sealed envelopes. Completed forms were returned by 45% of families in the school, including 91 African American parents. To increase the sample size for the present study, a second wave of data was collected the following year, resulting in an additional 24 African-American participants. Because of intensive subject recruitment, a higher proportion of parents agreed to participate in the first year;

however, the Year 1 and Year 2 participants did not differ significantly on any of the background variables.

Participants had been asked to indicate on the questionnaire whether they might be willing to be interviewed about their beliefs and practices. A subsample of 21 parents, all mothers, participated in these follow-up interviews in the spring of their child's kindergarten year. This group represented about one-third of those who had expressed willingness to be interviewed the previous fall. Only one parent who had originally agreed to be interviewed refused; however, many potential participants were difficult to contact because of frequent moves and other family transitions.

Interviews were conducted by telephone or, in a few instances, in a private room at the children's school. The majority of interviews were conducted by African-American research assistants. The present study reports only that portion of the interview data which deals with parents' home and school involvement in their children's learning.

Measures

Modified Educational Attitude Scale. This measure is a modified version of a self-report measure used in previous research with parents and teachers (Rescorla, Hyson, & Hirsh-Pasek, 1990). Both versions of the measure were designed to highlight contrasts between "high pressure" and "low pressure" beliefs about early development, learning, and child behavior. Previous research with a somewhat different version of the measure found associations between middle class White parents' endorsement of beliefs favoring adult-directed, formally academic approaches to early development and their use of more directive, controlling, and critical teaching strategies during parent-child interactions (Hyson et al., 1991). In the same study, "high pressure" scores on the

measure also predicted lower levels of creativity and higher test anxiety in young children (Hirsh-Pasek, Hyson, & Rescorla, 1990).

For the present study, this measure was modified (a) to reduce the number of items from 26 to 20, and (b) to highlight specific educational practices regarded as "appropriate" or "inappropriate," such as concrete object play versus workbooks. As in the longer version, participants indicated agreement with each statement on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Items were worded positively and negatively in quasi-random order to reduce response bias. Eight items tapped attitudes about early educational experiences; four of those items endorsed formal academic approaches, and the other four items would be considered consistent with "developmentally appropriate practices." Other items tapped expectations about children's compliance with social conventions and expectations about adult involvement in children's acquisition of social skills.

Using parents' agreement with each item on the 1-6 scale, the measure yielded subscores in specific domains. In this study, scores in the following domains were calculated and used in analyses: "Inappropriate Practice Beliefs": 4 items (e.g., "Kindergarten children learn best when adults give them facts and information"); "Appropriate Practice Beliefs": 4 items (e.g., "Kindergarten children learn best through free exploration and play"); "High Conventional Emphasis": 2 items (e.g., "Kindergarten children should say please and thank you"); "Low Conventional Emphasis": 2 items (e.g., "Kindergartners are too young to have good table manners"); "High Social Emphasis": 2 items (e.g., "Parents should teach their kindergartners ways of getting along with other children"); and "Low Social Emphasis": 2 items (e.g., "It's okay with me if my child isn't

popular with other children"). By reversing the scoring of "low pressure" items, a total score was also calculated, which reflected participants' overall press for early skill acquisition and adult direction of early development.

Parent Involvement Checklist Adapted from Galen (1990), the Parent Involvement Checklist is a 20-item list of activities that parents might use to support children's learning. The checklist includes activities that parent might do at home (e.g., "Read to my child"; "Play games with my child," items indexing communication between home and school (e.g., "Talk on the phone with my child's teacher"; "Send or get personal notes from my child's teacher"), and items assessing direct involvement in the school program (e.g., "Make materials for my child's classroom"; "Work on a parent committee.").

By checking off items on the list, participants indicated which of these activities they had done the previous year, and which they planned to engage in during their child's kindergarten year. Parents' past and intended involvement scores were calculated by summing the items checked; thus, scores could range from 0 to 20.

The checklist was supplemented by other questions concerning parents' desire to "Do more" to help their child learn, and about specific obstacles to their involvement in their child's learning, including financial problems, time, and school attitudes.

Interviews. As described above, 21 mothers were interviewed in the spring of their child's kindergarten year. Interviewers used a semistructured interview schedule with probes and open-ended questions. In one portion of the interview, participants were asked which of the activities on the Parent Involvement Checklist they had been able to become involved in during the past year. For each activity that the parent did

not engage in, reasons for non-involvement were probed; for example, "Was there any special reason why you weren't able to do that?" From these data, comparisons could be made between intended and actual parent involvement as reported by this subsample, and qualitative data were gathered about parents' perceptions of obstacles to their involvement.

Results

We first investigated general patterns in parents' educational and developmental beliefs. Next, we explored sources of variations in those beliefs. Finally, we examined relationships between parents' intentions and self-reported actions in becoming involved in their children's learning.

Endorsement of Adult Direction and Formal Academic Instruction

As a group, parents endorsed adult-directed, conventional values in educating their kindergarten children. 94% of the sample strongly agreed that "Teachers should help their kindergarten children learn to write letters and numbers"; conversely, 90% strongly disagreed with the statement "Teachers don't need to work with kindergartners on learning to read and write." As seen in responses to individual items displayed in Figure 1, many parents "strongly agreed" (rating of 6 on 1-6 scale) with statements that advocated adult direction of children's learning of academic content and social conventions, rejecting statements that had a maturationist or laissez-faire tone.

Insert Figure 1 about here

On the 6-point response scale, all the sets of items which tapped belief in adult direction, formal academic instruction, and compliance with social conventions received high levels of agreement: "Inappropriate Practice Beliefs" (M = 4.71, SD = .93); "High Conventional Emphasis" (M = 5.70, SD = .79); and "High Social Emphasis" (M = 5.49, SD = .97).

Generalized Press for Early Learning

This endorsement of formal academics did not carry with it a rejection of all developmentally appropriate educational practices, however. The set of items favoring "Developmentally Appropriate" practices also received high approval as well (M = 5.12, SD = .86). Parents' beliefs reflected a strong, generalized press for early learning, social competence, and compliance with social conventions, cutting across categories of "developmental appropriateness" or "inappropriateness." Table 1 displays correlations among the six belief domains.

Insert Table 1 about here

As expected, participants' agreement with formally academic or "inappropriate" educational beliefs correlated significantly with high expectations for children's compliance with conventions, $r(115) = .37$, $p<.001$). High endorsement of the set of "inappropriate practice beliefs" also correlated more modestly but significantly with belief in direct adult teaching of social skills, $r(115) = .26$, $p<.01$). However, in contrast to previous research, endorsement of these socially conventional beliefs also correlated

positively with belief in the set of "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" items, $r(115) = .27$, $p<.01$, and $r(115) = .34$, $p<.001$.

Scores on the sets of "Appropriate Practice Beliefs" and "Inappropriate Practice Beliefs" were positively and significantly correlated, $r(115) = .34$, $p < .001$). Two-thirds of the participants "strongly agreed" with both of these statements: "Learning to recognize letters and words are the most important reading readiness activities" and "Listening to stories and looking at books are the most important reading readiness activities." Similarly, 25% strongly agreed with both of these statements: "Kindergartners learn best when adults give them facts and information," and "Kindergartners learn best through free exploration and play."

To further investigate these response patterns, an exploratory factor analysis of scores on the six domains of the MEAS measure was conducted, using varimax rotation. The sample size was not large enough to warrant factor analysis using individual items in the measure (Nunnally, 1978). The analysis yielded two factors (eigenvalues > 1) which together accounted for 59% of the variance on this measure. Table 2 displays factor loadings for belief domains tapped by the MEAS.

Insert Table 2 about here

The first factor, accounting for 35% of the variance, seems to reflect a generalized press for competence. Compliance with social conventions and acquisition of social skills loaded highly on this factor. Furthermore, both "Developmentally Appropriate" and "Inappropriate" practice beliefs had high loadings on this factor. The second factor,

accounting for 24% of the measure's variance, primarily reflects a de-emphasis on compliance and social skills acquisition, but the "Inappropriate Practice Beliefs" had modest positive loadings on this factor as well (.30).

Variations in Parents' Beliefs

Despite these general trends, substantial variations were found in parents' beliefs. A series of 2 x 3 analyses of variance (Child Sex x Parent Education: Less than high school graduate, High school graduate, More than high school) examined the relationship between child and family characteristics and scores on the modified Educational Attitude Scale, including total scores and scores on specific domains.

Gender. Parents tended to hold boys to more stringent academic and behavioral standards. Parents were less likely to endorse the more play-oriented "appropriate beliefs" items for boys (M = 4.94) than for girls (M = 5.30), F (1, 105) = 5.58, $p < .02$), and boys' parents exerted greater "total pressure" as measured by overall scores on the modified Educational Attitude Scale (M = 4.52 vs. M = 4.34), F (1, 105) = 4.15, $p <$ .05. In the social domain, parents were less likely to endorse maturationist or laissez-faire statements for boys (M = 2.54) than for girls (M = 3.22), F (1, 107) = 4.70, $p<.05$. These patterns were especially evident for less educated parents, although this interaction did not reach statistical significance.

Parents' education. Parents with more formal education had a generally higher press for achievement, as measured by total scores on the modified EAS, F (2, 105) = 4.42, $p < .01$. However, few differences were found on the specifically "educational" sets of beliefs; instead, more educated parents tended to disagree with "Low Conventional

Emphasis" beliefs, F (2, 105) = 6.09, $p < .01$) and "Low Social Emphasis" beliefs, strongly favoring adherence to social convention.

Parents with more education reported that they had been involved in more activities on the Parent Involvement Checklist during their child's prekindergarten year, F (2, 105) = 4.45, $p < .05$), increasing in linear fashion with parents' education (M = 5.21, 6.67, and 8.74). However, no differences were found between less- and more-educated parents' intended involvement during kindergarten.

Interventionist Goals and Obstacles

Every participant agreed with the statement "I would like to do more to help my child learn." As Table 3 shows, many parents had engaged in organized education-related activities during their child's prekindergarten year. A large number planned even greater involvement in kindergarten, such as making classroom materials (55%), talking on the phone with their child's teacher (84%), and joining a parent organization (42%).

Insert Table 3 about here

Even at the beginning of the kindergarten year many parents reported one or more obstacles to their desire to be more involved in their children's learning, including lack of time (62%), distance from the child's school (36%), and financial problems (32%). In addition, 40% expressed the belief that they would be able to do more to help their children learn if they "knew more about how to teach my child."

The 21 parents who were interviewed at the end of the year shed some light on relations between intentions and self-reported actions. This subsample of parents had

expected to be involved in an average of 13 out of the 20 activities (SD = 4.59) listed on the Parent Involvement Checklist. However, they actually reported engaging in an average of 10.5 activities. The activities they did engage in primarily took place at home: all reported reading to their children and teaching them letters and numbers, often with flashcards or workbooks either purchased by parents or sent from school. Many parents had also been able to attend parent-teacher conferences, had helped occasionally in the classroom, had attended school events, and gone on field trips. However, no parents had actually joined a parent organization or worked on a parents' committee, and none had talked with their child's class about their work or skills (though 53% of the larger sample had intended to do so).

Several themes were apparent in the interviews. Almost without exception, parents wanted frequent communication about their child's progress, and they wanted explicit guidance about what to do with their child at home. One parent described going to the school to complain when the "homework" that used to be sent regularly stopped arriving. Lack of time because of work and family responsibilities was a second recurring theme. The parents in the interview sample led complicated lives. Many had more than one job or worked night shifts, limiting time and energy available for school-related activities. Some found creative solutions within extended families, like the parent who asked her sister to attend school functions in her place. Finally, parents frequently expressed disappointment that they had never been asked to do many of the activities on the checklist. Many asserted that they would welcome opportunities to make materials for the class, or to talk about their jobs, but that no one invited them to do so. One

parent described wanting to help with a class trip to the zoo and not being asked if she would volunteer (she ended up following the bus to the zoo and going anyway).

Discussion

The study's results fit well within the belief systems framework outlined by Sigel and others (1992). The results are also consistent with previous discussions of African-American child rearing values and with theoretical discussions of patterns of "adaptive strategies" employed by members of minority cultures (Ogbu, 1981, 1988).

Sigel has emphasized that beliefs about development and learning are the product of an active process of construction and reconstruction, in which parents select and integrate information, attitudes, and values from a variety of sources. From this perspective, African-American parents (in comparison to White majority parents) may be using distinctive sources of information and distinctive affective frameworks to construct a set of ideas and feelings about what their children need for their present and future development. Many of the attitudes expressed by participants could be viewed as reflecting culturally based values. Emphasizing the African roots of many Black child rearing practices, Nobles et al. (1987) asserted that several cultural themes have historically dominated parenting practices in African-American communities. Children are socialized to assume substantial family responsibilities and to express mature social behavior at an early age. Cultural values also stress a "sense of appropriateness, wherein we expect children's behavior to be governed by notions of formality, deference, and courtesy," and a "sense of excellence, wherein we expect and encourage children to

develop their own personal style while simultaneously doing the best at what they choose to do" (p. 48).

The present study's findings are also consistent with discussions of "adaptive strategies" that minority families may devise to gain access to the social institutions of the majority culture. Ogbu (1981, 1988) has suggested that minority parents attempt to develop in their children a set of "instrumental competencies" which assist children in performing adult political, social, and economic roles. In a study of low income Black parents' disciplinary practices, Kelley et al. (1992) make a similar point, emphasizing ecological factors that help determine patterns of parental control.

The present study indicates that, no matter what their educational level, most African-American parents of young children have an overriding interest in promoting children's learning with less precise concern for how it is done. The niceties of debates over workbooks versus blocks may seem irrelevant to parents coping with economic stress, racism, and anxiety over their children's futures. Both the interview data and analysis of the MEAS measure suggest that categories of beliefs that appear mutually exclusive to educators and researchers, and that are salient to advantaged members of White majority groups (Rescorla et al., 1990), may hold little importance for many African-American parents. Many parents unhesitatingly endorsed beliefs that educational theorists have regarded as philosophically incompatible, recommending dittoes and play dough, adult instruction and free play as equally beneficial to their children's development.

Parents' responses to the Modified Educational Attitude Scale, to the Parent Involvement measure, and to follow-up interview questions, paint a highly interventionist,

activist portrait of African-American parents' desired roles in children's early learning. Overwhelmingly, parents in this study believed that adults should constantly be doing something to scaffold children's learning and development. Their responses showed deep mistrust in the maturationist belief that children will do just fine if adults stand back and let development run its course.

The findings are consistent with work by Stevenson, Chen, and Uttal (1990), which showed that Black and Hispanic mothers put more emphasis on grades, homework, and direct instruction in academic skills than White mothers. Stevenson's study also showed that, compared to White mothers, more Black mothers wished to help their children with school work but reported that they did not know how. Commenting on a similar study, Alexander and Entwisle (1988) explained the contrast between expectations and behavior by noting that low income African-American mothers "may lack the experience, the knowledge base, and the personal resources for effective follow through" (p. 110). The results of the present study support this interpretation.

Besides helping to explain general patterns in beliefs and actions within the study's African-American sample, Ogbu's adaptive strategies perspective provides a better understanding of variability in parents' beliefs and actions. Patterns of gender differences can be understood in terms of parents' concerns regarding risks to African American males. Parents of boys seemed particularly focused on keeping a tight rein and directly teaching socially appropriate patterns of behavior.

Similarly, parents' education was associated with their beliefs and actions in ways consistent with Ogbu's model. All parents (regardless of their own education) had similar educational attitudes. In general, they favored strategies that might be avenues

to higher levels of children's success than this relatively low income group had found in their own lives. All parents shared similar desires to work closely with their children and their children's schools in bolstering children's skills and potential. However, more educated parents differed in several ways. They endorsed more socially conventional beliefs (good manners, cleaning up, popularity with other children), and they took part in a greater number of involvement activities before their children started school. From an adaptive strategies perspective, these parents may have had greater first-hand experience of the usefulness of these practices. More educated parents may also possess greater "social capital" (Goodnow, 1988) that assists in dealing with teachers, schools, and other institutional settings.

Even as supplemented by interviews, the written self-report method used in this study does not offer a full picture of parents' beliefs and actions. As Slaughter (1988) has noted, we still need to know more about how African-American and other ethnic minority families encourage childhood competencies in home settings, using repeated observations and qualitative as well as quantitative methods. The study's focus was also limited to questions about the respondent's (usually the mother's) beliefs and actions, although many of the participants were part of extended households whose other members may have had important functions in children's early education and development.

The participants in this study should not be viewed as representative of all African-American parents. The community was predominantly low income, urban, and highly mobile. Fewer than half of those contacted participated (although this was higher than administrators' predictions). Alienation from school, from researchers, and from

filling in written forms may have characterized the parents who did not participate. Social desirability may have colored some responses, particularly in parents' estimates of their own involvement in children's learning activities.

Although the study's primary goal was to investigate belief patterns within a particular minority community, further comparative study could be made with parents similar in economic and educational status but differing in ethnicity. Using an ecological, adaptational perspective, this kind of research might further clarify the contributions of both "primary" and "secondary" cultural differences (Ogbu, 1988) to parents' educational and developmental belief systems.

Despite these limitations, the study's results have implications for early childhood professionals, especially for those who may not share the culture of the children and families they serve. In communicating with parents of young children, early childhood professionals must be aware of parents' culturally situated beliefs and educational expectations for their children. They need to identify the aspirations and concerns that underlie parents' attitudes about curriculum and teaching practices. In doing so, they should recognize the variability within ethnic and economic groups and make an effort to find out what parents want for their children through first-hand conversations. Parents' desire to intervene in their children's learning can be supported through teacher-planned "homework" that empowers parents yet is consistent with professional standards. Administrators can work to find solutions to barriers of transportation and work schedules, enabling more parents to act on their desire for involvement. All school personnel need to reach out to families, resisting assumptions that stressed, overworked parents will not be interested in their children's development and learning.

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Endnotes

1. All adult respondents are referred to as "parents" in this paper, for the sake of simplicity and because they served parental functions.

Table 1

Correlations among Subsets of Items on Modified Educational Attitude Scale

Belief Sets	Inapp.	Approp.	Hi Conv.	Lo Conv.	Hi Soc.	Lo Soc.
Inappropriate Practice Beliefs		.34‾	.37‾	.12	.26‾	.16
Appropriate Practice Beliefs			.27‾	-.05	.34‾	.28‾
High Conventional Emphasis				-.14	.57‾	-.04
Low Conventional Emphasis					-.10	.32‾
High Social Emphasis						-.02
Low Social Emphasis						

•p < .05

‾p < .01

‾p < .001

Table 2

Results of Factor Analysis of Scores on Subsets of Items on Modified Educational Attitude Scale

	Factors[a]	
Belief Domains	Factor 1 Generalized Press for Competence	Factor 2 Low Social-Conventional Emphasis
High conventional emphasis items	.79	
High social emphasis items	.77	
Devel. approp. practices items	.65	
Inapprop. practices items	.64	.30
Low social emphasis items		.80
Low conventional emphasis items		.74

Note. Nuimbers represent factor loadings.

[a] Factors with eigenvalues > 1.

Table 3

Parent Involvement Checklist* Items with Percentages of Parents Who Participated and Intended to Participate in Each Activity

Item	Did Last Year	Will Do This Year
Read to my child at home	79	68
Teach my child letters and numbers	70	73
Play games with my child	75	64
Take my child on educational trips	30	71
Talk on the phone with my child's teacher	48	84
Read newsletters and notices from my child's teacher	65	79
Help my child with homework or school projects	61	83
Use computer with my child	8	51
Go to parents' meetings at school	36	74
Help in my child's classroom	31	55
Join a parent organization at school	21	42
Talk to my child's teacher before or after school	43	68
Attend parent-teacher conferences	49	80
Go on field trips with my child's class	30	78
Become friendly with parents of other children in the class	46	70

(table continues)

Item	Did Last Year	Will Do This Year
Attend classroom events, like children's plays or assemblies	38	81
Work on a parent committee	14	40
Send or get personal notes from my child's teacher	44	68
Make materials (like games) for my child's classroom	13	55
Talk to my child's class about my work or share a skill I have.	16	53

Note. Numbers are percentages of parents who reported being involved in each activity. Percentages for "last year" are based on those parents whose children attended early childhood programs (n = 83); percentages for "this year" are based on the total sample (n = 115).

* Adapted from Galen (1990).

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Items comprising sets of beliefs on modified Educational Attitude Scale, with percentage of parents who "Strongly Agree" with each.

PERCENTAGE WHO "STRONGLY AGREE"
0.0% 20.0% 40.0% 60.0% 80.0% 100.0%
"INAPPROPRIATE PRACTICE" BELIEFS
Learning to recognize letters and words are the most important reading readiness activities for kindergartners.
76%
Kindergarten children learn best when adults give them facts and information.
64%
Kindergarten children learn math best if they do workbook lessons.
30%
It's best for kindergarten children to copy what adults do when using crayons and magic markers.
19%
"APPROPRIATE PRACTICE" BELIEFS
Listening to stories and looking at books are the most important reading readiness activities for kindergartners.
75%
Kindergartners learn best through free exploration and play.
38%
Kindergarten children learn math best from playing with real objects like blocks and beads.
61%
It's best for kindergarten children to follow their own ideas when using crayons and magic markers.
50%
HIGH CONVENTIONAL EMPHASIS
I want my kindergarten children to clean up.
80%
Kindergarten children should say please and thank you.
90%
LOW CONVENTIONAL EMPHASIS
Kindergartners are too young to be expected to clean up their things.
6%
Kindergartners are too young to have good table manners.
7%
HIGH SOCIAL EMPHASIS
It's important for kindergartners to be good at playing with other children.
75%
Parents should teach their kindergartners ways to get along with other children.
81%
LOW SOCIAL EMPHASIS
It's okay with me if my child isn't popular with other children.
17%
Teachers don't need to teach kids about how to play nicely with others.
13%